



McDougal's Good Stories for Children



The Story of An Ancient Wishing Cap and the Trouble it Caused for Two Children

ANNETTE and Robin Pendleton often visited their grandmother, who lived in a cottage beside a forest brook, and while they played among the old-fashioned flowers comprising her garden—foxgloves, lilacs, hollyhocks and dahlias—over which the bees and butterflies came as soon as they got the cold out of their legs in spring-time and remained until winter threatened to catch them, and where always several bluebirds, orioles and wrens built nests every year, the bent old woman came and sat on the porch and watched them. Her eyes were too feeble to see them a few feet distant, but her hearing was almost as perfect as ever, and when the children often said "Oh, I wish I had this or that," "I wish I were somewhere," or "I wish I were a bird and could fly," or made other childish wishes, she bent over in her rocking chair and chuckled silently. They never noticed this action particularly, but long afterward Robin remembered it.

She was a strange and uncommon woman, this Grandmother Pendleton. Long before anybody else had ever heard of microbes, bacteria and germs she knew all about these interesting creatures, and she never ate any fruit without peeling it, always boiled all the water she drank and never allowed a fly or a mosquito to enter her cottage. Rats and mice, even cats and dogs, she declared, brought diseases, as well as canary birds; and carpets, she insisted, were responsible for more sickness than anything else.

HERE IS A SECRET

She made her husband shave every day because germs landed in whiskers, and sometimes she even contemplated cutting off her own hair for the same reason. She never allowed her children to eat candy, pickles or ice cream, nor drink root beer, coffee or tea. They had to drink hot water before every meal. But, strange to say, she was almost constantly a sufferer from rheumatism, neuralgia and dyspepsia, and, although she lived to be nearly 104 years old, she complained almost daily of something or other.

Of course, she was not so strict with her grandchildren because, you know, grandmothers can't be, and she let them have everything they wanted; so you may be sure they were very fond of visiting her, and went there as often as possible.

Her house was filled with wonderful things gathered from all over the world. Strange lamps, idols of jade and bronze, mystic carved prayer sticks from Indian lands, crystal balls from China, rare birds, stuffed alligators, flying fish, musical instruments, pipes, embroidered silks, incense jars from Japan and praying wheels from Tibet, skins from the North and fans from the South, pearl baskets and hookahs from the East, water jars and moose-horns from the West—in fact, from garret to cellar the little house was crammed, and so you may imagine what a place it was for children to play in.

Now I'll tell you a secret while no one is looking. Grandmother Pendleton was as near to being a witch as one could be and still not really be one. In her youth she had been loved by a great wizard, who had died and left her his property after teaching her some of his awful art.

LOST HER WISHING CAP

Among other things, he had given her a wishing cap, which, as you know, enables the lucky wearer to wish for anything and have it instantly. There was one funny drawback to this cap, which was that one could not make the same wish twice, but after all, with careful management, that was easily managed. I should think. Yet she was so unfortunate as to get into the most terrible trouble by her wishes, and when she finally extricated herself from her difficulties she impulsively wished that the cap would hide itself where she never could find it again.

It vanished, and, although in after years she often searched for it, for she was sure it was in the house somewhere, she never set eyes on it again. When she was dying she called Robin to her bedside and whispered to him:

"Be careful and avoid the wishing cap." But of course, as he had never even heard of such a thing, he imagined that his old grandmother was delirious, and thought no more of the matter.

After she had been buried they closed her house, and thus it remained until one day, when Robin was 12 years old, Annette proposed to visit the cottage. They opened the door and entered the silent, darkened hall, and it seemed as if their grandmother must be sleeping there, so familiar was everything, and so undisturbed. Opening a window and letting the sunlight stream into the rooms, they were shocked to see cobwebs and flies where she had so carefully excluded them always, and Annette said:

TOOK THE TREASURES HOME

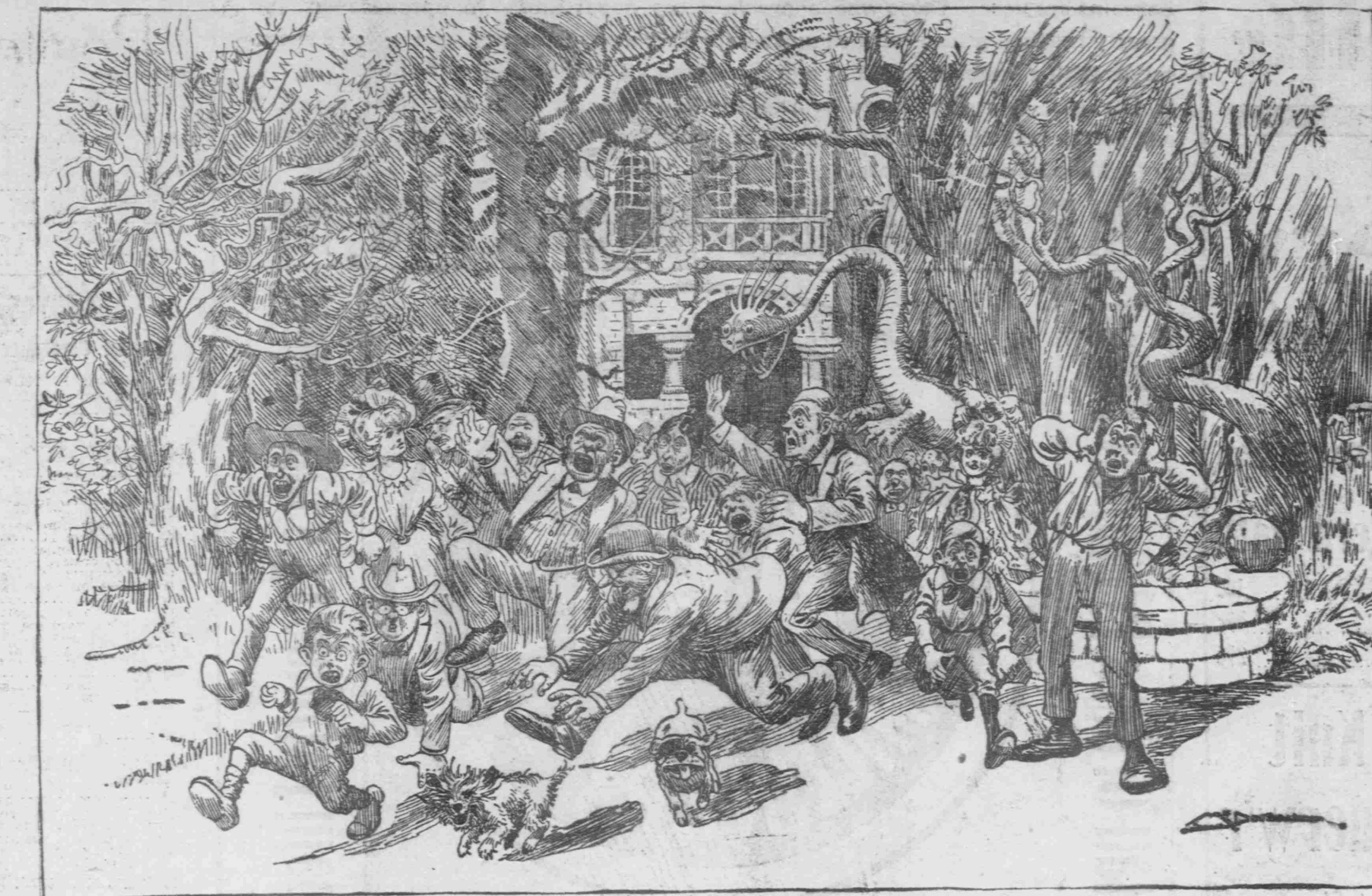
"It's a shame to have all these lovely things spoiled by neglect. Everything is getting rusty and moth-eaten. Let us take home as much as we can carry, and every time we come here after this remove something."

Robin agreed with her, and they selected very many objects; in fact, so many that they could not carry half of them. But at last each one had decided just what was the most precious, and home they went, with their arms filled. Their mother laughed when she saw them, but she said:

"To-morrow I will send a man with a wagon and bring home everything. I had intended doing it for a long time."

So everything was brought home, and the children enjoyed the task of arranging the beautiful strange objects in their new situation, and the task took some time, too, for there were very many of them.

Summer was almost gone when again Annette



THE ANGRY CROWD TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM THE BEAST

said she wished to revisit the old, deserted cottage and asked Robin to go with her. They started off at once, and soon were in the old house, now silent and desolate, filled with cobwebs and flies and dark as a cellar. Everything had been removed, but away up in a corner of the garret Robin came upon an ancient, faded Turkish cap, which had once been gay with scarlet and gold, its tassels gnawed by rats, its gold all tarnished. He put it on his head, boy-like, as he said:

"I wonder where this came from? I never saw it before. Perhaps it belonged to a Janizary."

HIS FIRST WISH

He kept it on his head when they went downstairs, and soon he forgot all about it being there. In the garden they picked some dahlias and asters, and made them into a splendid nosegay. Then suddenly Robin, noticing great activity among a number of ants in the path, bent down to examine them and said:

"What a pity it is that they are so small, for they are so very interesting. I wish that we were little ourselves and we had our camera, so that we could take a photograph of them."

The words were scarcely uttered before they both found themselves standing beside a camera on its tripod, facing toward the ants' nest, out of the dark entrance of which a gigantic head was protruding, upon which waved a long pair of antennae or feelers. Annette started in fear and clung to her brother. Nor was he less alarmed, but suddenly as the change had been he kept his presence of mind and said:

"Stand perfectly still. They say ants can't see, but only feel or smell. So perhaps they won't notice us."

Out came the huge ant, and another followed immediately, and both hurried away as fast as if they were ant doctors hastening to a patient. As they passed him Robin pressed the bulb of his camera and took a picture of the insects. While he was reversing his plate holder to take another if he had a chance there was a rushing noise above, and a bird so enormous that its shadow covered all the ground around them came fluttering down upon them, but Robin seized his sister and dragged her quickly into the ant hole. The bird pecked his bill into the tunnel, but they were safe for the moment.

ATTACKED BY THE ANTS

Hardly had the bird vanished than along came another ant, eagerly smelling and waving his feelers aloft, and to escape him they ran down the tunnel, and then, when in almost complete darkness they came to a turning, they stopped there, hoping the insect would pass them by, but he had scented them and stopped.

Then, while they trembled and pressed themselves as flat against the earth wall as possible, it felt along until its sharp-pointed antennae brushed against Annette's dress. Then it reached out its front legs and seized her.

She uttered a scream, and Robin tried to tear her away from the huge ant, but at that instant up came another as if summoned, and he grabbed Robin instantly. Then they were carried away, but quite carefully and tenderly, along passage after passage, far down into the underground halls, where the ants kept their eggs, passing the room where the queen ant sat surrounded by her workers, and soldier ants on guard, but of course they could not see anything of this, as it was dark as midnight there.

When they reached the egg storeroom they were deposited beside several great white eggs, and these were plainly visible, because a tremendous firefly was suspended from the ceiling to light, as well as to warm the apartment. There were numerous dead flies, or rather flies under the influence of some sort of narcotic, lying about, and Robin knew enough about ants to be aware that they were preserved as food for the little new-born ants, but he did not

relish the idea of being preserved for that purpose himself.

As the ants went away in a great hurry, as they always did, he said:

"We must get out of here at once. I have heard that sand wasps sting spiders and flies and things so as to preserve them alive for food, and I'll bet the ants do the same thing. They've gone for one of the stingers, I guess, to come and fix us. I wish an ant-eater would come along now and just root us out."

The next moment they fell overboard backward as a great hole appeared in the roof of the egg hall and a rush of daylight streamed in. Then they saw the long, hairy nose of an animal that seemed mountainous turning up the hills of earth eagerly and making meanwhile a great snuffing. Both of the children saw its long tongue lapping up ants by hundreds, and they had merely time to dart sideways and dash up a hill of sand ere it tumbled a great pile of soil upon the spot where they had stood.

They ran with all their speed, and only when hidden in a deep forest of grass under a raspberry bush did they stop to draw breath. Afar off they saw the ant-eater so far away that they could not tell his head from his tail, but after all that is always a difficult matter, I think.

"We aren't much better off!" exclaimed Annette. "I do wonder what has made us so small! See the flowers and the grass! Oh, look! there is a bumble bee as big as a cow, and he's coming this way!"

FOUND A LONG LOST RING

"He makes a noise like an automobile!" said Robin. "But I don't think he will harm us."

Suddenly Annette saw something gleaming in the grass near them, and, making toward it, she exclaimed:

"Oh, look! Here's an immense gold ring! I'm sure it's gold—and look! there's a diamond in it!"

Robin ran to it, and, sure enough, there lay a ring so huge that they both had difficulty in climbing over into its circle of gold. A great diamond, dulled by dirt and dust, and yet shining in its depth with liquid flame, was set in the ring, and on the inside they saw three great letters carved on the shining surface.

"E. V. P!" cried Robin. "Why those are grandmother's initials! This must be the ring she lost when she first came here to live."

"Yes," added his sister. "I have often heard her tell how she lost it in the garden the very first time she went into it, and how she always searched for it every spring. Well, we have found it, but what good will it do us? We can never move it."

"Oh, dear!" cried Robin. "What a pity! I do wish we were big again, so we could carry it right home to mamma."

ANOTHER WISH GRATIFIED

Suddenly they found themselves as large as ever, standing beside the box border of the path. The grass came almost to their knees instead of waving high above their heads, and both instantly, when they realized that they had regained their former size, dove into the grass and began to search for the ring. They found it at once, and, you may be sure, wasted no time in starting for home with the ring on Annette's finger. It was quite a long walk, and the day was very warm, so before they had gone half the distance they sat down in the shade of a wayside tree to cool off and admire the glittering diamond.

"How lovely it would be to have lots of them!" exclaimed Annette, flashing the gem in the sunshine. "I would just love to be covered with them, as Sir Walter Raleigh or the Duke of Buckingham was."

"They must have looked grand!" added her brother. "I'd like to wear such clothes instead of simple shirtwaists and knickerbockers. I wish we both had the finest suits ever seen."

Annette uttered a little shriek of amazement, for

there sat Robin in satins and silks, gems and laces, looking like an Elizabethan courtier, and then as she turned her eyes down she saw that she also was in similar fine array, and all covered with gleaming pearls and diamonds. They both sprang up and stared at one another.

"We are bewitched, I really believe!" cried the girl, as she felt of a great string of pearls as big as marrowfat peas.

"Something's surely happened to us to-day!" added Robin. Just then a cart passed by and the driver stared at them in astonishment and said:

"Where are you from? Is the circus a-comin'?"

A GRAND COACH FOR THEM

But neither of them deigned to reply. He drove on, turning back to stare occasionally until beyond the bend in the road. Then Robin said:

"Gracious, we can't be standing here in the road like this! People will be gathering around. You look just like a fairy princess in a story!"

"And you like a prince," she rejoined. "We ought to have a gilded coach with six white horses."

"I do wish we had," said Robin with emphasis, "and then we wouldn't have to walk home."

There stood beside them a gorgeous coach, all white and gold, with six champing, pawing steeds, and coachmen, as well as footmen and outriders in plenty. The door was opened by a footman, who bowed to them, and without a word Annette sprang into the coach, and Robin followed more slowly, for he was amazed that every wish was instantly gratified. He now began to suspect, but he did not guess the source of all these wonders. They rode along the highway and people came running out of the houses to stare. Almost everybody thought it was an advertising wagon and that they were selling some kind of soap or patent medicine.

When they reached town the excitement became intense, and on stopping at their own door a crowd collected. Their mother ran out in some alarm and asked what the masquerade meant. Robin tried to explain what had happened to them, but she could not understand it. He tired at last and said:

"I wish we could have a house away back in a park so people couldn't gather round and stare at us."

THIS WISH BROUGHT TROUBLE

Instantly they were standing, coach and all, before a very handsome residence, surrounded by tall trees and with a wide drive leading out of sight. No one was near them but their mother and the coachmen. Mrs. Pendleton was so astounded that she was speechless. Robin was now becoming used to these sudden changes, and he said:

"Come, let us go indoors and look at our new home."

The coachman touched his hat and asked: "Where shall we take the horses, sir? Will you need the carriage again?"

"Drive them to the stables," said Robin. "I s'pose there are stables. I wish for them, anyhow!" The coach was driven behind the house and he led his mother indoors. It was a great wide hall into which they entered and all row to them, but in it were the many curious things their grandmother had collected. Mrs. Pendleton sank into a seat and stared around.

"This must be magic!" she gasped. From the window Robin could see an immense expanse of woods and lawn, all belonging to the house, and far away he saw the familiar chimneys of the town houses, the church and the public school. All the well-known streets and buildings had disappeared, however, in the immediate vicinity.

"Isn't this great!" he cried. "And won't father be tickled when he comes home to-night?"

At that moment a great crowd of angry and excited people came surging up the driveway, brandishing clubs and even guns, and all shouting in a great rage. They halted before the imposing house with many expressions of astonishment, of course, for this wonder was beyond all knowledge.

Found Among Their Old Grandmother's Possessions, it Worked its Charms Successfully

Yet their hesitation lasted but a minute, then they began to shout:

"Where are our houses?" "Give us back our homes!" "Restore our streets and our dwellings." "Bring back my store, you rascal!" cried a fat merchant. "Where's my tannery?" shouted another man. "Yes, and my plumbing shop!" "And my real estate office, my safe and life insurance policies!" "And my millinery shop, with all those brand new bonnets, direct from Paris!" "I've lost all my new furniture!" shouted a woman; "and I've only paid one instalment on it, too!" "Where have you taken my library?" demanded another man. "I had twelve thousand rare books ten minutes since, and now I find only a blank book!" "You've got my week's washing!" screamed an old woman, "and I'll have the law on you."

"What right have you," demanded a policeman, angrily, "to destroy all these houses? You never had a charter from the Legislature!"

Robin was truly alarmed, although had he stopped to think he could at once have restored everything to its former condition, but in his excitement he forgot to wish properly and he cried:

"I wish something would come after you all. A plesiosaurus or something like that!"

TWO STRANGE BEASTS

Then a wild outcry arose in the rear of the crowd and there was a great scattering. Robin ran out on the porch and saw at once that a huge gray animal was charging the disturbers, an animal so immense that his funny head, far too small for his great body and with a neck many yards in length, was held as high as the third-story windows. His sharp, white teeth glittered in the sunlight and his claws were held aloft in a very threatening manner as he advanced upon the amazed people, who, however, did not wait for his approach but ran hastily, with many loud cries of fear, through the woods.

Some ran into the cellar, others dived into fountains or climbed trees, but most of them ran with all their might and vanished in the thick shrubbery. The plesiosaurus was rather slow and failed to catch any of them, and when he found nobody in sight he turned his attention to the house and tried to climb into the windows.

He could get his head and long neck in almost anywhere, but his thick, clumsy body was much too unwieldy to enter even the wide doorway, but it was awful to behold the destruction he made among the chairs and tables in the front parlor. Mrs. Pendleton had fled with her children to the top floor, and here Robin looked out of the window at the great gray body sprawling below and shouted:

"I wish a megatherium would get after you and drive you away!"

Hardly had he uttered these words than a terrible lizard-like monster rushed from the woods and attacked the plesiosaurus from behind before he could get his head out of the window. The megatherium, all spines and hard knobs, was far more formidable than the first saurian, and, besides, he had him at a disadvantage, but he made an awful fight.

EVERYTHING RIGHT AGAIN

They struggled right there at the front door, and now and then both would fall against the house with a shock that shattered the very masonry, loosened beams, broke windows and shook down plaster by the bushel. They roared, hissed, growled and spit, clawed up the very trees, tore immense holes in the lawn, broke down statues and fountains, but neither gained mastery, while the children tremblingly gazed down upon the combat in terrible alarm.

Suddenly, as the house tottered and seemed about to fall, Robin bethought himself and shouted:

"I wish I'd never made any wish at all. This is awful. The house will go next."

He looked about him. There he stood beside Annette in the cottage garden, with the flowers gently shaking in the summer wind, the bees humming drowsily and the big black ants hurrying hither and thither like messenger boys in the path. He stared at Annette, who said:

"Goodness, what an escape! Here we are back again in grandma's garden!"

"I was thinking that I must have been dreaming," replied Robin, "but we couldn't both have dreamed the same thing. I wonder what did it!"

"Let's go home at once," suggested Annette, "before anything else happens to us. But throw away that nasty, dirty old cap. Who knows who has been wearing it. Some tramp, very likely."

So Robin tossed the old wishing-cap into the grass beside the fence, and they closed the door of the cottage and hurried home.

ANOTHER FOUND THE CAP

They were a trifle disturbed as they approached the house, for they feared to see evidences of the disorder caused by the dreadful combat of the two extinct animals, but everything was as serene as the summer sky itself and nobody seemed to remember that anything out of the ordinary had occurred. So they decided to keep silence regarding their adventures, and in a little while they were persuaded that they must have somehow happened to dream the same dream, for it all seemed so impossible. But when Robin, in reflecting upon the strange occurrence, suddenly remembered that his grandmother had cautioned him to avoid the wishing cap, he at last concluded that for a few hours he had worn that magic head covering.

He went at once to the garden and searched for it, but he never saw it again.

It was found by another, and I shall tell in another story what wonderful adventures followed the picking up and wearing of that faded old Turkish fez, but as Robin never had anything marvelous happen to him afterward, that's all there is to this tale.

WALT MCDUGAL.